



# THE INDIAN FARMERS' PROTEST: TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE 2020 FARMERS' PROTEST INFLUENCE THE LEGITIMACY OF INDIA?

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## ABSTRACT

India's 2020 Farmers' Protest was one of the largest protests the world has ever witnessed. It was organised by Indian farmers in response to the passage of three farm regulations in 2020. Protestors claimed that these laws failed to address rural distress issues. Consequently, few critics claim that India's legitimacy has consistently diminished as a result of the protest. This research paper seeks to comprehend the connection between the 2020 farmers' protest and India's legitimacy. Utilising surveys of farmers and the general public in addition to online secondary research, a qualitative research design was employed. This study addresses the primary causes of the protest and the effect of the government's response on its legitimacy. In addition, the paper discusses the major outcomes of the protest and the public's perception of the government's response.

**KEYWORDS:** 2020 Farmers' Protest, farm regulations, rural distress, legitimacy, government's response, public perception

## INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector of any state holds immense importance in the functioning of a nation. Farmers, who play a crucial role in feeding the populace, serve as the backbone of the agricultural industry. However, in recent years, the plight of farmers has become a subject of concern and extensive discussion. Declining farm incomes, increasing protests, inadequate agricultural infrastructure, ineffective government policies, and a distressing rise in the mortality rate among farmers have been witnessed. In India, the incidence of farmer suicides is alarmingly high. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 10,281 farmers committed suicide in 2019 (NCRB, 2019). These distressing circumstances have led to widespread protests by farmers, who cite issues such as debt, crop failure, low income, and inadequate government support as the primary reasons for their discontent.

This study aims to examine the impact of the 2020 Farmers' Protest on the legitimacy of India. Research indicates that the government's response to agricultural issues in the country was met with dissatisfaction among the public, despite the subsequent repeal of the farm laws that initially sparked the demonstrations. This research holds significant importance as it investigates the effect of a major political event on the legitimacy of a nation. Legitimacy refers to the belief that a government's authority is just and valid, playing a crucial role in the success and stability of any governing body (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2015). Notably, protests can significantly influence the perception of citizens towards their government. The Farmers' Protest garnered international attention, leading to discussions about the treatment of Indian citizens by their government and raising questions about the government's commitment to democratic principles (Singh, 2021). To analyze the extent of the protest's influence on India's legitimacy, this research incorporates interviews with Indian farmers and the general public, supplemented by extensive secondary research to support the study's results and findings.

The Indian farmers began their protest in September 2020 in retaliation to the three farm acts passed by the Indian parliament (The Economic Times, 2021). After submitting to the demands of India's farmers, the administration eventually repealed all three farm bills in November 2021. During this time, The Samyuktha Kisan Morcha (SKM) reported that 702 farmers had been killed in protests against the farm laws (Deccan Herald, 2021). It was evident by the end of the protest that the farmers desired higher prices for their produce. They demanded an increase in the minimum support price and the development of the country's agricultural sector.

## Introduction to the Three Farm Laws:

1. **Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020:** This legislation grants farmers the freedom to sell their produce outside of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) market yards, thereby providing opportunities for profitable prices through alternative trading channels. The government contends that this act will expand farmers' options by reducing market costs and enabling higher prices while exempting farmers from any sales taxes (PRS Legislative Research, 2023). However, concerns have been raised among farmers regarding the potential elimination of the minimum support price (MSP)-based procurement system and the vulnerability of their crops to exploitation by private companies.

2. **Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020:** This act enables farmers to enter into contracts with agribusiness firms for the predetermined sale of agricultural products while also providing them with access to modern technology and improved inputs to enhance their income (PRS Legislative Research, 2023). However, farmers argue that this law disproportionately benefits multinational corporations aiming to monopolize Indian agriculture and food production. They express concerns about their vulnerability and potential disadvantage in the face of dominant large private companies.
3. **Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020:** This act removes commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onions, and potatoes from the list of essential items and imposes stock-holding limits on those products. According to the government, the purpose of this act is to encourage private investment in agricultural sectors and to stabilise prices (PRS Legislative Research, 2023). Farmers have been in a state of panic over the possibility that large corporations will gain the freedom to stock commodities and govern farmers.

## Methodology

This study's objective was to examine the impact of the 2020 Farmers' protest on India's legitimacy. To accomplish this, two surveys were conducted and analysed. In the first survey, a batch of 100 farmers were asked the following questions:

1. Are you a farmer?
2. Did you participate in the 2020 Indian Farmers' Protest?
3. If yes, what motivated you to participate in the protest?
4. Do you think the protest had an impact on the legitimacy of India?
5. How did the protest impact your livelihood as a farmer?
6. Were you satisfied with the government's response to the protest?

In the second survey, a batch of 200 general public was asked the following questions:

1. Do you know about the 2020 Farmers' Protest in India?
2. Do you think the protest had an impact on the legitimacy of India?
3. Do you believe the government's response to agricultural issues is sufficient?

The surveys were conducted online as it was more feasible to administer and faster to collect data. By collecting data online, respondents' privacy and their information could also be respected and kept confidential respectively. To avoid placing farmers at a linguistic disadvantage, the survey questions were also asked in a local language as part of the research's ethical considerations. To provide a foundation of extant knowledge and data, secondary resources and statistics were also utilised throughout the process. In addition, secondary research validated and verified primary research. However, as a result of insufficient sample size, the research may have a few constraints. If the sample size were larger, the data would have relatively lesser anomalies. Overall, the methodology involved participants, the use of a survey platform to collect data, data analysis using statistical techniques, and obtaining ethical approval.

## Results

According to the first survey, where farmers were asked several questions, 68.3% of them believed that the protest had an impact on the legitimacy of India, 9.5% answered maybe, while 22.2% of them said no (see Figure 1).

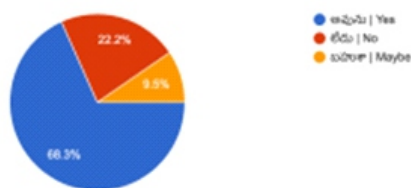


Figure 1: Percentage Response to the Protests' Impact on the Legitimacy of India

Furthermore, when they were asked if they are satisfied with the government's response to the protest, 46% of farmers answered no, 46% answered yes, and 7.9% of them said maybe (see Figure 2). Many of the farmers in the protest said that the main reasons that provoked their participation were to go against private corporations and to obtain justified prices for their produce. Few of the farmers also answered that the public's trust in the government has significantly decreased. Additionally, respondents were worried about not being recognised enough for their hard work. A few responses also justified that the consequences caused by the farm bills initiated the protests.

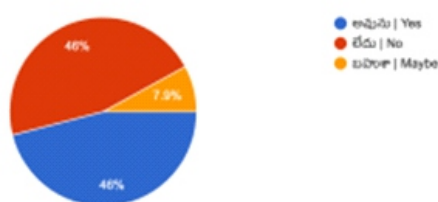


Figure 2: Percentage Response to the Respondents' Satisfaction with the Government's Response

From the results of the second survey, where the general public was asked their opinion regarding the farmers' Protest, 55.8% answered that the protests have impacted the legitimacy of India, 28.8% said maybe, and 15.4% answered no (see Figure 3). Similarly, when they were asked if the government's response was satisfactory, 43.1% said no, 33.3% answered yes, and 23.5% of them selected maybe (see Figure 4).

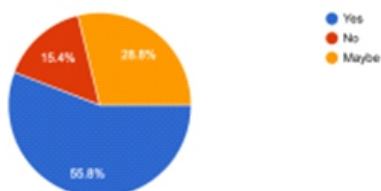


Figure 3: Percentage Response to the Public's Opinion on the Impact of the Protests on the Legitimacy of India

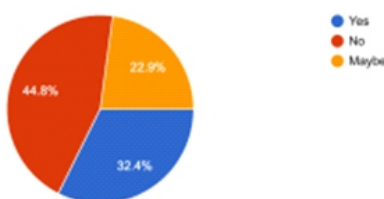


Figure 4: Percentage Response to the Public's Opinion on Whether the Government's Response was Satisfactory

From the secondary research, the global economy shows that the state legitimacy index — 0 (high) - 10 (low) — has gone to 4.3 in 2021 from 4 in 2020 (see Figure 5). The legitimacy index improved from 4.10 in 2019 to 4 in 2020 and decreased continuously after that (4.3 in 2021 and 4.4 in 2022).

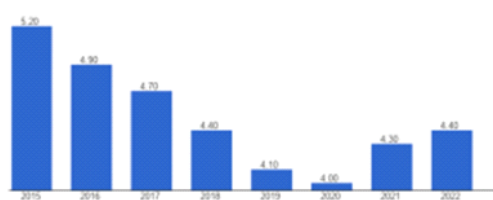


Figure 5: Observed Change in India's Legitimacy Index (2015-2022)

## Discussion

According to the research results, it is implicit that the legitimacy of India has been weakened as a consequence of the Farmers' Protest. Nearly 62% of those surveyed believed that the Farmers' Protest diminished India's legitimacy. Second, it is evident from secondary research that India's legitimacy has decreased between 2020 and 2021. This may have occurred due to two reasons: either the citizenry opposed the agriculture laws, or they were dissatisfied with the government's response to the protest. Almost 39% of people answered that they were not satisfied with the government's response to the protest. Although the research does not entirely prove that the government's response was deficient, it should be of utmost concern that the agricultural sector of India does not remain impoverished despite the country's economic growth. It is vital that the government as well as the citizens of the country collaborate and ameliorate to develop the agricultural aspect of the country's economy.

## Conclusion

The Indian Farmers' Protest was primarily sparked by the three farm laws introduced by the governments: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. They have been observed to have influenced the legitimacy of India. This research assisted in determining the opinion of farmers and the general public regarding the impact of the protest on the legitimacy of the state. While only 40% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the government's response to the demonstration, nearly 60% stated that the protest affects the government's legitimacy. In addition, secondary research indicates that India's legitimacy has diminished in 2021 compared to 2020. Successful agricultural laws implemented in other nations should be studied and further research should be conducted to ascertain the required steps that should be taken to ensure that future parliamentary bills are passed convincingly for the betterment of Indian farmers and the overall Indian agricultural sector.

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